

March 5, 2017

Don't Give Up!

Don't Give Up Prayer!

Luke 11:1-4

Opening words: Did you know 24% of all Americans observe the season of Lent? Lent comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring." Excluding Sundays, because every Sunday is a little Easter, Lent is a forty-day period. Why forty days? Because, Jesus fasted forty days before being tempted by Satan. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends Holy Saturday. What are you going to give up for Lent? Maybe this is a better question: What are you not going to give up for Lent? Never forget it, Lent is not a season of self-deprivation, it is a season of spiritual renewal.

This is sermon number two in my six-part sermon series *Don't Give Up!* We are going to look at five of the twelve spiritual disciplines. Once we are done, we will have looked at fasting, worship, meditation, the Bible, and today's topic, prayer. Did you know, according to Lifeway Research, 55% of all Americans pray every day? That percentage jumps to 88% when a loved one is facing a hardship. Our scripture reading for today is Luke 11:1-4. Let me call this message *Don't Give Up Prayer!*

Luke 11:1-4 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

² He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.

The great reformer Martin Luther once said, "*To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.*" I have always found truth in that quote. If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves this morning in the eleventh chapter of Luke. The story begins with Jesus praying. This is the truth: Jesus was always praying. The scriptures tell us he prayed when he was alone. He prayed in public. He prayed before meals. He prayed before and after healings. He prayed before making an important decision. He prayed to do God's will and he prayed before he taught about the importance of prayer. I feel comfortable saying, no one has ever prayed more than Jesus. This story begins with Jesus praying. Once he had finished, the disciples asked him to teach them how to

pray, like the followers of John. The disciples are not looking for instructions on how to hold their hands or close their eyes. The disciples are looking for exact words. Every rabbi, every teacher, taught their students, or disciples, exact prayers. If you heard the prayer, then you could identify what rabbi that disciple followed. John had taught his disciples a certain prayer that was unique from all other rabbis. Peer pressure is a powerful thing. Jesus's disciples wanted him to teach them an exact prayer so they can be like everyone else in their uniqueness. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer has five different petitions. The disciples asked Jesus about prayer years ago, but the topic is still relevant. There are many people in our time who do not understand prayer.

One of the most well-known people in America today is Ted Turner. He will tell everyone with ears, he is an atheist. He was not raised that way. He was raised in a strict Christian home. He says he was saved seven or eight times. He turned his back on the faith when his sister grew terminally ill. He prayed for God to heal her, but she died. Turner was devastated and walked away from the faith. Did you hear what I said? He walked away from the faith because he didn't get what he wanted. He walked away from the faith because he simply didn't understand prayer.

Prayer isn't a way to get what you want. Jesus didn't get what he wanted. The cup wasn't passed. He went to the cross. Paul didn't get what he wanted. He healed others but he couldn't heal himself. The wound in his side remained. Prayer is not a way to get what you want. Prayer is an opportunity to cultivate a relationship with God. Never forget, when you pray, you are speaking to the God of the universe. That is why the attitude you bring into prayer is so important. You are not speaking to your best friend or a co-worker. You are speaking to God. The attitude you bring into prayer is extremely important. How many people bring a horrible attitude into their prayer life? What kind of attitude do you bring into your prayer life? You find certain attitudes in the Lord's Prayer. They are the attitudes we need. So, let me ask you three quick questions.

When you pray, do you pray with a grateful spirit? In Jesus's prayer, he was thankful for his daily bread. Jesus doesn't teach us just to be thankful for the extras in life. Jesus taught us to be thankful for the everyday things in life. Are you thankful for basic things you have in life? In your life, do you see what you have, or do you only see what you want? When you pray, do you pray with a grateful heart?

When you pray, do you pray with a forgiving spirit? In Jesus's prayer, he tells us to forgive others, as God has forgiven us. Is there anyone here today who needs to be liberated from an unforgiving heart? Who do you need to forgive today? How can you talk with God, who forgave you of so much, and not forgive someone else? When you pray, do you pray with a forgiving spirit?

When you pray, do you pray with a trusting spirit? In Jesus's prayer, we are to trust God. "Lead us not into temptation." The key word in that line is *lead*. There is a

world of difference between being led and being an adviser. It is a good question. How far do you trust God? Do you trust God blindly, or do you just want to be God's adviser? When you pray, do you pray with a trusting spirit?

During this season of Lent, I would encourage you to examine the attitudes you bring into your prayer life. Never forget, you are speaking to the God of the universe. If you will take some time and examine your prayer life, say, "**Amen!**" It is important you bring the the right attitudes into your prayer life.

It must have been nearly two years ago, I was visiting someone at Saint Elizabeth Hospital on Belmont Avenue in Youngstown. I parked in the parking deck, crossed the street and entered the hospital. After getting my person's room number at the information desk, I headed for the elevators. I punched the up button, when he walked toward me. He was a young man, wearing a knit hat and a red, green and black leather jacket. Together from opposite ends of the universe, we stood side by side waiting for our elevator. I couldn't help but notice he was holding a white plastic bag. It was easy to see the contents inside the bag because the condensation off the six-pack of the Colt 45 cans made the bag transparent. Do you know what Colt 45 is? Don't be so pious. At one time, Billy Dee Williams was Colt 45's spokesperson. It's a malt liquor. Can I be honest with you? I have never drunk a single Colt 45 because I am afraid. I am sure it tastes horrible and I think it will make you go blind. This is where the story gets interesting. I couldn't resist. I looked at the young man with the knit hat and the leather coat and asked him if he bought the six-pack at the hospital gift shop. He laughed and smiled, revealing his gold tooth. He said, "No sir, I bought at the store across the street. I'm taking them to my sick friend here in hospital and we are going to split them." He asked me if I was visiting a sick friend. I said, "Yes," and told him I was a minister. He put down his bag filled with the Colt 45 and stuck out his hand. He said, "My name is Rodney. Why don't you come down with me to my friend's room? You can pray for him and the three of us can drink some Colt 45." I refused his offer for several reasons. This is the real reason. My mom raised no fool. Can I ask you a question? Do you think Rodney had the right attitude about prayer? Maybe this is a better question.

Do you have the right attitude about prayer? As we come to this Communion table, don't forget, prayer is not just a way to get what you want. Prayer is a discussion with the God of the universe. That should change your attitude about prayer. Do you pray with a grateful spirit? Do you pray with a forgiving spirit? Do you pray with a trusting spirit? Did you know 55% of all Americans pray daily? How many of those people pray with the right attitude? Martin Luther once said, "*To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.*"

Will you pray with me?